

The President's Daily Brief

10 April 1970

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THE PRESIDENT'S DAILY BRIEF

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PRINCIPAL DEVELOPMENTS

The party central committee is expected to meet in Moscow today, and if it does it may stop some of the extravagant rumor-mongering about a shake-up in the Soviet power structure. (Page 1)

Le Duc Tho is leaving Paris for Hanoi, but it is hard to say if he is really needed at home or if his departure is just another slap at the US. (Page 2)

In Saigon, the National Assembly will balk at giving Thieu special decree powers. (Page 3)

[REDACTED] Cambodia. (Page 4)

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[REDACTED] Cambodia [REDACTED] (Page 5)

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[REDACTED] Lao [REDACTED] (Page 6)

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The Canadian Parliament now has government-sponsored legislation giving Canada control of the northern archipelago and setting a 12-mile territorial limit. (Page 7)

[REDACTED] (Page 8)

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USSR

The French press report from Moscow that the Soviet party central committee will meet today in Moscow is the most specific report of the many we have seen recently on this subject. The "informed Soviet sources" quoted by AFP claim that this is the first step toward an eventual reshuffle of the leadership. They note, however, that the meeting might be delayed, pending the recovery of the four ailing leaders--President Podgorny, Premier Kosygin, and politburo members Suslov and Shelepin.

We have no firm evidence to confirm or deny this report. Soviet Ambassador Dobrynin, a candidate member of the central committee, is leaving for home on 10 April, but his trip had been planned since mid-March. The Soviet ambassador in Rome, who is a member of the central auditing commission but not of the central committee, left his post on 1 April, presumably for home leave. No other ambassadorial travel, which we sometimes note in connection with plenums, has been reported.

Rumors of impending changes in the Soviet leadership have been flying for the past week, sparked at least in part by the absence due to illness of so many members of the politburo. If a central committee meeting indeed comes off, it could be for the purpose of demonstrating the unity of the leadership, despite the widespread reports of rifts, or for some routine purpose.

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NORTH VIETNAM

Le Duc Tho, the real power in North Vietnam's delegation at the Paris talks, is returning to Hanoi. North Vietnamese officials in Paris announced that he will leave today. Tho returned to Paris in late January after a seven-month absence, ostensibly to attend the French Communist Party Congress. Why he stayed on for some two months after the congress has never been made clear.

Tho's return probably is connected with a new round of decision-making in Hanoi, possibly involving the coup in Cambodia and last week's proposals by France for international consultations on Indochina. As a ranking politburo figure, Tho probably would have a hand in any decisions that are to be made. His previous departures from Paris have seemed to signal the start of over-all policy reviews.

Tho's trip also could serve a narrower, tactical purpose. It could be designed as pressure on Washington. The Communists may attempt to depict Tho's departure as a result of American obduracy in not sending a replacement for Ambassador Lodge.

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SOUTH VIETNAM

The National Assembly probably will resist passage of Thieu's planned legislation giving the president special decree powers. When Khiem presented Thieu's scheme to the Upper House on 8 April, he did not indicate how Thieu would use such powers if he had them, but South Vietnamese officials believe they will be directed at resolving economic problems and, perhaps, responding to the grievances of the disabled veterans.

Thieu is already under heavy criticism for relying on extraconstitutional devices, such as the military tribunal which recently convicted Tran Ngoc Chau. The Assembly is jealous of its prerogatives, however, and is highly unlikely to grant Thieu more extensive authority than he already has, especially in sensitive economic matters.

Cambodia: Current Situation



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SOUTH VIETNAM - CAMBODIA

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The South Vietnamese carried out several raids into Cambodia during late March, after which there was a lull in such activity for about a week. Since 5 April, however, South Vietnamese troops and air forces have conducted daily cross-border raids on the Communists in Svay Rieng Province.

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The Communists, meanwhile, are continuing to put fairly strong pressure on Cambodian border defenses in Svay Rieng Province. They probably intend to use whatever force is necessary to ensure the security of their border bases and north-south supply routes. A major thrust by the Communists deep into Cambodia seems unlikely for now, unless their position along the border becomes untenable because of repeated attacks from the Vietnamese side.

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CAMBODIA

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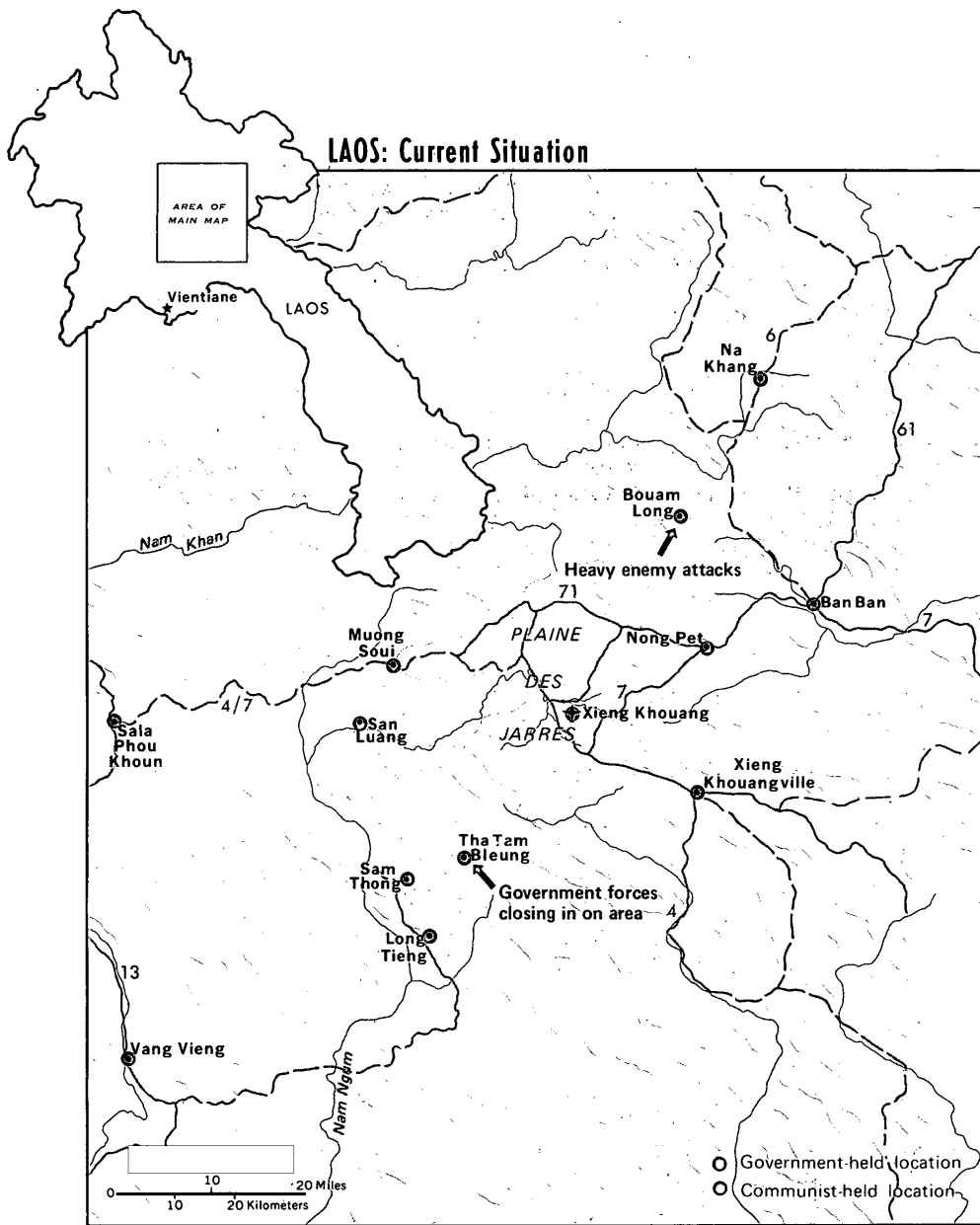
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LAOS

The government's response to the Lao Communist peace proposal, delivered yesterday to Pathet Lao representative Soth Phetrasy in Vientiane, amounts to a counterproposal to the Neo Lao Hak Sat's statement of 6 March. Sidestepping the Communist demand for an unconditional bombing halt, the text calls for a total cease-fire and the immediate withdrawal of "foreign forces," supervised by the International Control Commission. It also calls for a meeting of "interested parties" in order to seek an equitable solution.

The message is replete with references to North Vietnamese aggression in Laos and makes it clear that this is at the heart of the country's difficulties. It does not, however, pose the withdrawal of North Vietnamese troops as a precondition to a cease-fire or talks. The reference to a cease-fire in "all zones without exception," which presumably would include the Ho Chi Minh trail area, may have been designed to appeal specifically to Hanoi. Government leaders probably realize, however, that the Communists would almost certainly reject meaningful supervision of their "liberated areas."

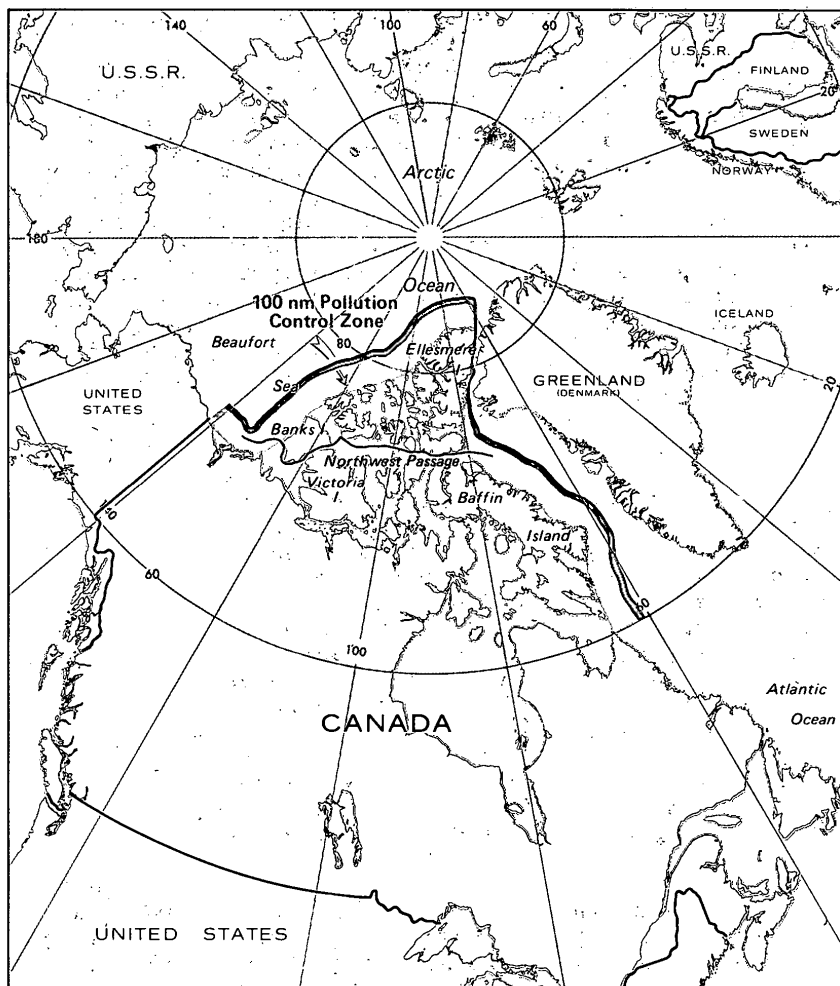
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Heavy fighting has again broken out near Bouam Long, the government's most important base north of the Plaine des Jarres. On the night of 8-9 April, several hundred North Vietnamese troops attacked four outposts commanding the southern approaches to the base. Guerrilla defenders successfully repulsed all of the attacks, but large numbers of enemy troops--probably from the North Vietnamese 312th Division--continue to maneuver throughout the area. Bouam Long itself remains under sporadic artillery fire. The Communist actions have already neutralized several of the government's heavy weapons in the area, and the situation is described as serious.

South of the Plaine, government forces are continuing to close in on the key enemy position at Tha Tam Bleung.

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Canada Moves to Prevent Pollution of Arctic Waters



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CANADA

A bill introduced in Parliament Wednesday provides that ships transiting the Northwest Passage will have to comply with stringent antipollution regulations. Trudeau also tabled legislation that, if passed, will extend Canada's territorial seas to 12 miles.

Although the bills as written avoid any outright claim to sovereignty, in effect they give Canada full control over the northern archipelago. The government stressed to the press, however, that the waterway would be open to "innocent passage" by ships of all nations.

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USSR-EGYPT

The Soviet helicopter carrier Moskva is in Alex-
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*The Moskva's visit probably is intended as a
display of Soviet support for the Arab cause.
Probably it also means that the Moskva's
role in the Soviet naval exercises in the
Mediterranean has been completed.*

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